

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-13 ISO-00 SSM-03 SAA-01 CIAE-00
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AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY PARIS
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AMMAN PASS AMB ATHERTON

E. O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PEPR MILI LE IS SY US
SUBJ: ISRAEL AND THE LEBANESE CHRISTIANS

1. ISRAEL'S CURRENT RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CHRISTIAN MILITIAS IN LEBANON IS BASED UPON THE ASSESSMENT THAT THE GOI WILL REMAIN UNEQUAL TO THE TASK OF REASSERTING ITS AUTHORITY THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY. THEREFORE, THE MILITIAS ARE THE ONLY REAL DETERRENT TO THE SYRIANS BECOMING EVER MORE

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DOMINATING IN LEBANON AND THE PALESTINIANS REVERTING TO THEIR ATTACKS ON ISRAELI SETTLEMENTS ALONG THE NORTHERN BORDER. PUT SIMPLY, THE CHRISTIAN MILITIAS ARE SEEN BY THE GOI AS THE MAIN FORCE HOLDING LEBANON BACK FROM EVENTUALLY BECOMING A CONFRONTATION STATE. THE ISRAELIS, LIKE THE U.S. WOULD PREFER THAT CHRISTIAN HOT-HEADS NOT PROVOKE THE SYRIANS, BUT AT THE SAME TIME THE ISRAELIS WILL COUNSEL

NOTHING TO THE MILITIAS THAT WOULD REDUCE THEIR ABILITY TO DEFEND THEMSELVES AGAINST WHAT THE GOI MAY BELIEVE IS AN INEVITABLE SYRIAN ONSLAUGHT. ALSO, ISRAEL CERTAINLY HAS LIMITS ON ITS ABILITY TO SUPPRESS THE MORE COMBATATIVE INSTINCTS OF THE CHRISTIAN LEADERS WHO SEE IT IN THEIR INTEREST TO TAKE ACTIONS TO DRAW THE GOI INTO THE LEBANESE BOG.

2. WHILE DOING SOMETHING TO RESTRAIN THE CHRISTIANS, THE ISRAELIS HAVE TRIED TO IMPRESS ON THE SYRIANS THAT A MOVE AGAINST THE CHRISTIANS IS LIKELY TO DRAW IN THE IDF ON THE SIDE OF THE MILITIAS. IN THE SHORT TERM, THE ISRAELIS WANT THE SYRIANS TO STOP KILLING CHRISTIANS AND PULL OUT OF EAST BEIRUT. BEYOND THIS OBJECTIVE, HOWEVER, THE GOI IS SHARPLY DIVIDED ON THE UTILITY OF THE SYRIANS REMAINING IN LEBANON. ON THE PLUS SIDE, THE SYRIAN ARMY NOW HAS DISPERSED FORCES, EXTENDED SUPPLY LINES, IS SUFFERING THE INSIDIOUS INFLUENCES OF BEING AN OCCUPATION ARMY AND IS THOROUGHLY ENTANGLED IN THE LEBANESE POLITICAL IMBROGLIO. SOME ISRAELIS CONTINUE TO BELIEVE THAT THE SYRIANS WILL SOONER OR LATER SEE IT IN THEIR INTERESTS TO ASSERT CONTROL OVER THE PALESTINIANS. ON THE OTHER HAND, AN EQUAL NUMBER IN THE MOD AND IDF SEE THE SYRIANS AS A THREAT TO THE EXISTENCE OF THE MILITIAS AND A LONG-TERM STRATEGIC DANGER TO ISRAEL'S NORTHERN BORDER. THIS CONTROVERSY REMAINS FUNDAMENTALLY UNRESOLVED WITHIN THE GOI AND WILL PROBABLY REMAIN SO BARRING AN ALL-OUT CHRISTIAN-SYRIAN SHOWDOWN.

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3. SYRIAN ASSURANCES THAT THEY ARE NOT LOOKING FOR A CONFRONTATION WITH THE PHALANGE AND CHAMOUNISTS BREAK NO ICE HERE. WHILE THERE IS THEREFORE THE EXPECTATION THAT FURTHER CLASHES ARE LIKELY, ISRAELIS ARE FULLY AWARE OF THE LIMITED MILITARY OPTIONS AT HAND SHOULD THE SYRIANS AGAIN MOVE AGAINST THE CHRISTIANS. THEY REALIZE THAT THREATS TEND TO LOSE THEIR EFFECT THE MORE THEY ARE USED AND THAT AERIAL DISPLAYS CAN EASILY BECOME, THROUGH REPETITION, AN EMPTY GESTURE. NONE-THELESS, IF THE THRESHOLD OF VIOLENCE REMAINS LOW, THE ISRAELIS ARE UNLIKELY TO MODIFY THE CURRENT RESPONSES. A MORE INTENSE OR LONGER SHELLING OF EAST BEIRUT WILL PROBABLY RESULT IN ADDITIONAL PUBLIC AND PRIVATE THREATS TO THE SYRIANS AND VERBAL REASSURANCES TO THE MILITIAS BACKED UP BY INCREASED ARMS RESUPPLY. HOWEVER, IF AN EXTENDED BLOW-UP SHOULD RE-OCCUR, THE ISRAELIS PROBABLY WILL BECOME MORE DEEPLY INVOLVED. IF THE SYRIANS DO MOVE TO DISARM THE MILITIAS IN EAST BEIRUT AND CHRISTIAN RESISTANCE TURNS THE OPERATION INTO A BLOODY HOUSE-BY-HOUSE STRUGGLE, THE GOI WILL FEEL ITSELF UNDER TREMENDOUS PRESSURE TO INTERVENE IN SOME FORM.

4. IN CONSIDERING HOW TO TRANSFORM THE CURRENT SHAKY CEASE-

FIRE IN BEIRUT INTO SOMETHING LESS EXPLOSIVE, WE HAVE OUR DOUBTS THAT WE CAN GET THE ISRAELIS TO LEAN ON THEIR CHRISTIAN ALLIES ANY MORE THAN THEY HAVE ALREADY DONE WITHOUT SOME VISIBLE SYRIAN DISENGAGEMENT ON THE GROUND. IF THE SYRIANS CAN SHOW THE CHRISTIANS AND THEIR ISRAELI FRIENDS THAT THEY ARE NOT PLANNING TO POUNCE AGAIN, THAT THEY ARE PULLING BACK, MAYBE WE CAN TALK THE GOI INTO TRYING TO PERSUADE THE MILITIAS TO GET OFF THE STREETS AND LET THE LEBANESE ARMY OR INTERNAL SECURITY FORCE POSITION THEMSELVES AT BEIRUT FLASHPOINTS. THE ISRAELIS CERTAINLY REALIZE THAT CONTINUATION OF THE PRESENT SITUATION PROMISES EVENTUALLY TO PRESENT THEM WITH A NIGHTMARE CHOICE: WATCH THE CHRISTIANS IN EAST BEIRUT DIE OR START THE NEXT MIDDLE EAST WAR. IF WE CAN GET SOMETHING FROM THE SYRIANS, WE MAY BE ABLE TO MAKE THE

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GOI A PARTIAL ASSET IN OUR ATTEMPTS TO PULL THE FUSE FROM THE POWDER KEG IN BEIRUT. LEWIS

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